

Testimony for Public Hearing  
Education Committee  
March 14 2018

Erin E. Stewart  
27 West Main Street  
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*SB No. 456 - An Act Concerning Assistance To School Districts That Enroll Students From Puerto Rico Who Have Been Displaced By Hurricane Maria.*

Good Afternoon Chairmen; Sen. Gayle Slossberg, Rep. Andrew Fleischmann, and Sen. Toni Boucher, along with Ranking Member, Rep. Gail Lavielle as well as Education Committee Members.

My name is Erin Stewart and I am the Mayor of the City of New Britain.

As you know, our school systems have worked tirelessly with local partners to welcome hundreds of students who have come to our State after being displaced by hurricane Maria. The City of New Britain, has enrolled more than 200 students since the hurricane. It is with great privilege that our city helps to educate these newly enrolled students. What you may learn however, is that many of these children require special needs, including bilingual services and other costly supports.

As you can imagine, the price of educating hundreds of displaced students has far exceeded the amount of funds available in the school district's budget. We currently are

trying to absorb an additional estimated \$1 Million dollars of educational expenses. The Education Cost Sharing grant for Fiscal Year 2018 does not account for these new enrollees, who arrived after the grants were issued.

While Senate Bill 456 would allow a school district to enter into a memorandum of understanding with other school districts for the purpose of educating and supporting displaced students from Puerto Rico, my district's current needs are monetary in nature. Classroom size is an additional concern; we are at capacity and overcapacity in many cases depending on which school you look at. The critical funding to continue supporting these students is paramount.

I ask you to consider assisting our community - which has enrolled substantial numbers of students from Puerto Rico and the Caribbean – with the appropriate financial support. We are encouraged that the Bipartisan Budget Act recently passed by the U.S. Congress includes \$2.7 billion specifically for school districts with displaced students, and we ask you to ensure the State Department of Education works to get these funds to school districts like New Britain as soon as possible.

It is important that we are able to accommodate and continue supporting the educational needs of these students and their families. Many have lost their homes and

the stability of a community they know. It is not clear how many of these students will be returning to the classroom next year, but we certainly need to be prepared for the numbers we currently support. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Mayor Erin E. Stewart